

**REMARKS OF NANCY FLOREEN
ON FY05 TRANSPORTATION BUDGET
May 20, 2004**

As Chair of the Transportation and Environment Committee, I must say that despite the lack of support that we deserve to receive from the State, we are driving this year's transportation budget forward. There are some real concrete advances, adding projects that our residents will see results from very shortly.

By our actions today, I am proud to say that this Council has just committed an additional targeted package of over \$7.5 million to transportation – this decision will bring about the single largest increase in this area in well over 15 years, all because we are increasing the energy tax.

When the transportation budget bus tried to leave the depot, we knew that the Governor had siphoned off a good portion of the gasoline. We lost \$10 million

in highway user fees last year, which put us way behind right from the start. We haven't gotten that back, and the Governor refused to consider a number of measures that might have funded critically needed transportation projects.

We appreciate the State's commitment to moving the ICC forward. But that is only one part of our countywide approach to congestion relief.

Our State Legislators gave a priority list to the state with the top 15 SHA approved transportation projects for the County. We received funding for just two – the Montrose Parkway/Rockville Pike grade-separated interchange and only part of the Woodfield Road project.

This underfunding is especially galling when you consider what Montgomery County does for the state. County residents pay more in Maryland taxes than anyone else in the state. As an example in the

operating budget, for every dollar that County taxpayers send to Annapolis, the state sends just 12 cents back to County government for operating expenses. That puts us behind all but two other counties.

But we weren't prepared to leave transportation projects – and our residents – stuck in traffic. So we rolled up our sleeves and really increased transportation funding. We added \$59 million to the County Executive's recommended capital budget, for a total of \$521 million. This is a 15% increase over the last 6-year CIP that the last council approved. On the operating side, we added another \$2.6 million, for a grand total of over \$126 million, including basic transportation operations and transit.

\$700,000 of these additions will come from additional parking permit fees, rates and penalties. We'll earn about \$300,000 from bus advertising this year, and at least \$600,000 next year, when the

program will be fully effective. Increased Ride On fares (from \$1.20 to \$1.25 – in line with Metrobus) will yield almost \$300,000. And we're getting another \$600,000 for transportation by increasing the cost of the 20-ride pass.

All these dollars will help with resurfacing, which has been a real focus this year. We're improving intersections and enhancing the automated traffic management system. We're accelerating sidewalk replacement, adding new sidewalk projects, and we put money in for trail maintenance that had been zeroed out by the Executive. And we added significant funding to the tree maintenance program which had fallen way-way behind (no pun intended).

These initiatives are needed, but they don't go far enough to relieve our number one problem: traffic congestion. So Council President Silverman and I proposed, and our colleagues supported, additional

dollars to improve transit options and increase road capacity.

Most of our package will go to making transit more frequent, more accessible and less expensive. As parents we have all heard that song, “the wheels on the bus go round and round”. This budget will ensure that they keep rolling, and many of them will carry you for free.

- We’re adding 7 new small Ride On buses, and 6 more CNG buses, to increase the frequency on current routes while simultaneously improving air quality.
- We’re extending the hours that buses will run on 5 routes, and adding 4 new routes on weekends.
- We’re building the Glenmont Garage to get residents onto the Red Line and off of Georgia Avenue.
- We’re expanding Freewheeling days. We offered this program in the past from Germantown to the

Shady Grove Metro, and it was a great success. Now we'll expand the program to offer free bus rides all day long on weekdays on 15 routes, including several cross-county routes and in some of our most congested areas, such as the Rt. 29 and I-270 corridors.

- We're increasing transit subsidy programs like Fare Share and Super Fare Share, so that more commuters can use public transportation and leave their cars at home.
- We're getting back to basics on a major east-west road by re-timing the traffic signals to keep vehicles moving as efficiently as possible. This common sense approach should make a big difference.
- For cycle commuters, we'll be constructing the Metropolitan Branch Trail in Takoma Park and the Stewart Avenue Trail Connection.
- On the road front, our package accelerates Snouffer School Road, Watkins Mill Road Extended and Observation Drive. These projects

have now been moved up by three years, along with Father Hurley Boulevard and the Burtonsville Access Road, which we tentatively approved earlier in the CIP. This should help relieve congestion that much sooner.

It's not going to solve all our problems but it will move us forward.

Overall, the budget should let us continue our progress on reducing congestion, improving transit and cleaning up the environment. I hope to drive this further down the road next year.